

[From the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, May 12, 2014]

NEARLY 180 SEX OFFENDERS ARRESTED BY RGV SECTOR AGENTS SO FAR IN FY14

EDINBURG, TX.—U.S. Border Patrol agents from the Rio Grande Valley Sector have arrested nearly 180 illegal immigrants with prior convictions for sex offenses so far for fiscal year 2014, which began Oct. 1, 2013, and goes through Sept. 31, 2014.

The majority of the sex offenders have convictions for sexual assault crimes involving children. Some of the more heinous offenses include: sexual assault of a child; sodomy, lewd or lascivious acts with a child under 14; aggravated sexual assault of a child; and aggravated indecent assault and corruption of a minor. The sex offenders have convictions for crimes that occurred in states from coast to coast as well as in the Rio Grande Valley.

In addition to the arrests of convicted sex offenders, agents apprehended three illegal immigrants over the weekend who have arrest warrants for sex-related crimes. They include a Mexican national wanted in Fort Worth on a continuous child sex abuse charge; a Salvadoran wanted by the Loudan County Sheriff's Office in Virginia on a charge of adultery/fornication; incest with a child between 13-17 years of age; and another Mexican national wanted by the Travis County Sheriff's Office on a charge of indecency with a child/sexual contact. The three men were turned over to the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office pending extradition.

Additionally, agents have arrested more than 50 members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, or MS-13, a notorious transnational criminal gang that started in Los Angeles, and about 14 members of the 18th Street gang.

The Rio Grande Valley Sector is part of the South Texas Campaign, which leverages federal, state and local resources to combat transnational criminal organizations. To report suspicious activity, call the sector's toll-free telephone number at 800-863-9382.

Mr. CORNYN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. As a Senator from a Western State, as is my friend from Texas, I hope the American people understand the only thing the Republicans can do for whatever happens is blame President Obama: Oh, it rained today—it is President Obama.

How about the most obvious point—that the Republican House has failed to take up an immigration bill. The Senate did it in a bipartisan way. I applaud that bipartisanship. We did it a long time ago. The fact that the Republican House refuses to do it never passes the lips of my Republican friends in the Senate.

If we want to correct our immigration system, we have to sit down and do the hard work, as we did in the Senate. There is no question that we are facing a crisis with children from Central America running away from gangs, violence, rape, and deprivation. There is no doubt about it. The fact is we can deal with that, but we have to look at the laws, and that is why we want to set the rules in a bill.

There is lawlessness because we haven't updated our laws. For example, we have to make sure these short-term holding facilities have humane conditions. We can do that by law.

I want to say to my friends on the other side of the aisle, because it is

cloudy one day, don't blame the President. Because it rains the next day, don't blame the President. If you wake up with a sore throat, don't blame the President. When you have trouble at the border, look at your own party, which has held up immigration reform. If we can do it over here, they can do it over there. The whole world is watching.

It is the same way with the veterans. I am hoping and praying that this new effort by Senator SANDERS and Senator MCCAIN will bear fruit in the Senate on a VA bill. But remember that the Republicans filibustered the last BERNIE SANDERS bill, which would have added clinics, which would have addressed the problems. They filibustered it.

Keep your ear open here. We have a chance to address so many issues.

STUDENT DEBT

Mrs. BOXER. I talked about immigration. I talked about veterans. We have a chance now to deal with the student loan crisis, and it is a crisis.

The student loan debt is \$1.2 trillion. That is more than credit card debt.

In my home State, the average amount owed by a borrower in 2012 was more than \$25,000—a 65-percent increase from 2004. In the same time period, the number of Californians with outstanding student loan debt increased by 60 percent.

In addition, in 2012 there were 641,000 Californians over the age of 50 who were still paying down their student loans and more than 6.8 million people over 50 nationwide still paying off their student loans.

This is a crisis that must be addressed. It is important to our Nation's economy. It is important to the future of our families, to our children, and our grandchildren. It is time to act.

I have to say, Senator WARREN has been a tremendous leader. We can take an important step toward addressing this dire situation by passing Senator WARREN's Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act. It would help millions of Americans refinance their loans at lower interest rates, put more money in their pockets. I have to say, it is kind of a no-brainer. When you have more money in your pocket than you had before, you are going to spend it in your communities.

I am so proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation.

Sadly, even though the Federal Government is the biggest student loan lender, and it is making billions of dollars in profits each year, it doesn't allow its borrowers to refinance their existing student loans when rates are low. That is wrong. Our middle class is hurting.

The New York Federal Reserve Bank and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau have been warning us that student loans are acting like an anchor on our economy.

When our President took office, there was a crisis. We were losing 700,000 jobs

a month. He has turned it around, and now month after month we are creating over 200,000 jobs, and we have restored all those jobs we lost. But why would we keep this anchor of student loan debt on our economy?

For example, students can't buy cars because they have so much in student loan debt. They can't buy houses.

Andrea from San Francisco writes:

My boyfriend and I both have student debt. He started with \$90,000 and has finally gotten it down to \$50,000 after 10 years of paying. I recently finished my MFA and now have \$56,000 in debt. This has kept us from saving for a house, purchasing a car, and doing things day to day that would boost the economy, like shopping and going out to eat.

Patrick from Thousand Oaks wrote to me and said:

I pay half of my monthly wages to cover the interest alone on my loan.

Worse still, many young Americans wrestling with student debt cannot save enough to start a family.

Stefanie from Pacific Grove wrote:

We are finally starting a family in our late 30s. My husband has been paying off his student loans for ten years. This loan will cost him twice as much as he borrowed—doubling the cost of his college education. That is simply not fair. If the Fed sets interest rates low for everyone else, why not for students?

As Stefanie's story illustrates, student debt is not only a drag on the American economy, it is tearing at the fabric of our American dream.

I read last week that for the first time a majority of people don't really believe the dream will be there for them as it was for us. When 40 million people in America are struggling with a combined \$1.2 trillion in student debt, it is no wonder the American dream is elusive.

I have 3.7 million Californians dealing with \$97 billion in student loans, and many of these loans are stuck at outrageously high interest rates—7, 8, 9 percent. With interest rates this high, it is hard for anyone to pay off their debt, and it is really hard for recent graduates who are just launching their careers.

In order to help the nearly 40 million Americans with student debt, Senate Democrats have introduced this plan, with the leadership of Senator WARREN. It is a simple plan. The idea is to let borrowers refinance their outstanding student loan debt.

We are at a time of record-low interest. I am asking rhetorically whether it is fair to charge 7, 8, 9 percent interest when the Federal Government lends money to banks at less than 1 percent. The people who have borrowed money to pay for college or send their children to college are trapped with these exorbitant interest rates. And the private student loans can be even worse. I have seen 10 percent and 11 percent.

The Senate Democratic proposal would allow borrowers of both Federal and private student loans to refinance from their high rates into much lower rates. The rates would be 3.86 percent for undergraduates, 5.41 percent for graduates, and 6.41 for the parents who

have helped their kids. Those are the rates Democrats and Republicans agreed on last year, and those are the rates new borrowers received this past school year. But the older borrowers are stuck with these exorbitant rates, and they can't refinance. If those lower rates are good for new borrowers, why wouldn't we allow them for those who have been stuck in this vicious cycle of these high rates?

These young people are not saddled with this debt because they went to the mall and bought a lot of clothes. They worked hard to learn new skills that will benefit our Nation and help keep us strong. They deserve a fair shot at saving and building a career and having a family.

Matthew from Antelope, CA, wrote to me and said:

I have never worked harder on one single goal than to be the first in my family to gain a degree in higher education. I've been on the Dean's List every semester in college. [But] the ever-present fear of paying off the thousands of dollars of interest I have gained is overwhelming and I am struggling to see past it.

If big banks, which collapsed our financial system, are able to borrow at a rate of nearly zero percent, I don't see why students who will ultimately grow our economy and grow our nation cannot borrow at the same rates.

Matt from Newport Beach, CA, said:

I am grateful for my college education. As a son of middle-class parents, I knew [college] was an investment in my future, despite the need to take out loans. I even graduated in three years and served as a Resident Adviser to keep costs down. However, my student loan debt is now a major expense that hangs over me as a working adult. It affects my ability to achieve certain life milestones—buy a house, finance a wedding, and save for retirement.

I support efforts to refinance loans at low interest rates—rates comparable to those in the real estate market. Please take action! With more affordable student loans, my generation can grow this economy.

Matt, Matthew, and their classmates who worked so hard to achieve their dreams deserve a fair shot. Tomorrow morning we will have a chance to make achieving the American dream a little easier for Matt, Matthew, and all our struggling college students. So I stand with Matt, Matthew, Patrick, Stefanie, Andrea, and the 40 other million Americans with student loans.

What we are saying is very simple: We want to give students who are trapped in those high interest rates a chance to refinance. We pay for it by saying that those billionaires who aren't paying at least as much as their secretaries pay at least as much as that. It is called the Buffett rule. I can't imagine a better way to pay for this than that.

I urge my colleagues—Democrats and Republicans—to stand with my constituents and their own constituents by voting to let us move forward to consider the bank on students act.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I rise to speak today on behalf of our veterans. I am here to speak about both challenge and opportunity. The challenge is the problems we face with our Veterans' Administration, which is that we are not getting the care for our veterans that they need and that we all want them to have and that they so very much deserve.

We also have a real opportunity because we have been working on legislation. We have legislation on the Republican side in the Senate and on the Democratic side, and now we are working to bring those two pieces of legislation together. So I think this creates a real opportunity, and it is a vitally important opportunity—one that we grab and that we address on behalf of our veterans. We need to make sure we come together on bipartisan legislation that fixes the Veterans' Administration health care system, and it takes care of our veterans.

I believe the solution, the real key to solving the problem, is choice—or another way to put it might be access to health care. I think that not only solves the problems we have seen with the wait lists but also the problem of distance, which is also an issue, and it is a challenge we see in States such as my own. For example, in our State the issue truly is distance. In other places it is access to health care. We know, for example, in places such as Phoenix, veterans were put on wait lists and in that way denied access to care. That is absolutely unacceptable—absolutely unacceptable.

I think the Veterans Choice Act, which I am pleased to cosponsor with a number of my fellow colleagues, solves that problem, and it solves not only the access and the wait list problem but also, as I have said, the distance problem essentially by providing choice, meaning that if a vet can't get access to a veterans health care facility, then the veteran can go to another health care provider. I believe that works for the vet and it works for the health care provider. The veteran can go to a hospital or a clinic that has the service he or she needs if he can't get into the VA facility in a timely way, and then that hospital or clinic is reimbursed just as if it were for a Medicare patient. Clearly, our health care system has the facilities in place, the resources to handle that type of reimbursement just as they do for Medicare patients.

Now I wish to speak about the distance issue for just a minute because in North Dakota the distance issue is the one we face. For example, in North Dakota it is about 800 miles round trip from Williston to the VA health care

system in Fargo. Some services, as we all know, are provided by CBOCs—community-based operating clinics—and we have those around the State. But where we don't have CBOCs or where they are not able to get the service they need from that CBOC or walk-in clinic, then it can be an 800-mile trip to get services.

Not too long ago I held an open forum in Williston, ND, which, as many people know, is the site of an incredible energy boon, the Williston Basin. Now in North Dakota we produce about 1 million barrels of oil a day—second only to the State of Texas. So we have a tremendous number of people moving into this region. We are the fastest growing State in the Nation. We have veterans there who are driving long distances to get medical services. So this is a different challenge than we faced in some of the centers such as Phoenix where they were waiting to get patient care. In our case they are having to drive long distances—as I said, 800 miles round trip to Williston; 400 miles to Fargo and then 400 miles back.

I recently held a forum up in Williston to discuss this issue and look for solutions on behalf of our veterans. I met with our veterans, I met with veterans service officers, as well as health care providers from the region. I talked to two vets who told me their story about trying to get health care. We have a walk-in clinic, a CBOC—community-based operating clinic—in Williston. There were two cases where veterans needed some health care services. In one case, because they couldn't—the first veteran couldn't get it at the local CBOC, that individual took a day to drive to Fargo, which is 400 miles, stayed in a hotel, the next day went in and got those services, stayed in a hotel that night, and then drove back the third day. So he had to take 3 days off of work to get services. He had to drive 800 miles round trip. He had to be put up in a hotel for 2 nights. Now, all of that is reimbursed, as far as the travel in the State, by the VA. So for a relatively straightforward procedure, the VA paid a lot more and inconvenienced that veteran terribly and cost him money because that individual had to take 3 days off from work. That doesn't make any sense.

In the second case, a veteran in a similar situation wanted to get the service at the local CBOC, wasn't able to do that, but instead of driving all the way to Fargo and doing what the first veteran did, the second individual just went into the local clinic or hospital in Williston and got the service that afternoon. Unfortunately, the second veteran is still trying to get reimbursement out of the VA for that procedure.

The individual in the second case did not have to take 3 days off from work, which is smart and, frankly, saved the VA a lot of money because it was not a case where you had to drive down, get reimbursed for that stay with over two